

Linnea Engström: EU must do more to combat 'scourge of the oceans'

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News

Vice-Chair of Parliament's fisheries committee warns that without urgent action, we may be the last generation to catch food from the oceans.



A Vice-Chair of Parliament's fisheries committee has called for more EU-wide action to combat the "scourge of the oceans."

Swedish member Linnea Engström was speaking after the Commission last week warned three countries in the Pacific, Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean about illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Kiribati, Sierra Leone and Trinidad and Tobago each risk being listed as "uncooperative" in the fight against illegal fishing.

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If identified issues are not resolved within six months, the EU can consider taking further steps, including trade sanctions on fisheries imports.

At the same time, the Commission agreed to remove trade measures off Sri Lanka, as it says it has "significantly improved" its national fisheries governance.

On Tuesday, Engström told this website, "Global fish stocks are exploited or depleted to such an extent that without urgent measures we may be the last generation to catch food from the oceans.

"Today, 85 per cent of global fish stocks are over-exploited, depleted or fully exploited. Unless we act now, seafood may disappear by 2048."

The Greens/EFA group deputy said, "The main leverage the EU has to promote sustainable fishing is to use market pressure. Everyone wants to export to the EU with its huge market. In 2014, the EU imported fish and seafood for a value of some €21bn."

To stop fish stock depletion, she says it will not be enough for EU fishing vessels to behave responsibly.

"Other big fishing nations like China, Russia, Thailand and Taiwan will also have to improve their industries behaviour. What we need is a level playing field.

"This can be achieved through the use of appropriate quantitative and qualitative restrictions on access to the EU market, so as to not undermine the progress being made in combating IUU fishing."

Environmentally and socially responsible caught fish should be a requirement, she argues, for placing products on the European market. Products that cannot guarantee compliance with these conditions, or with consumer protection regulations, should be barred from the European market.

"To limit market access is a hard sell in today's globalised world, but it is a necessary measure if we want to stop the 'race to the bottom' and succeed with a 'race to the top'".

She adds, "Encouragingly, the fisheries committee stands united on this approach across the political spectrum."

Engström says her own initiative report on the external dimension of EU fisheries, recently voted in Strasbourg, also supports this approach by stating that bilateral and multilateral trade agreements negotiated by the EU should promote environmentally sustainable and socially just conditions.

She says one current problematic case is Guinea, a country that has held a red card for several years,

but has made "very little, if any, serious progress."

"The Guinean government may be working on their legislation, but the implementation is not satisfactory to say the least. EU ship-owners are complaining as one of the consequences of a red card is that there can be no EU bilateral agreement, no private agreement or chartering to the third country.

"We are watching Guinea very carefully."

Coming next, says Engström, is the important revision of the fishing authorisation regulation, that deals with how the EU can improve sustainable fishing of EU-vessels in third countries, and for which she will serve as rapporteur.

Ahead of this, her message is, "The struggle to stop the scourge of the oceans continues."

About the author

Martin Banks is a journalist for the Parliament Magazine

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